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# An apology by Reagan is advised *Dole, Laxalt urge better management*

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WASHINGTON — Senate Republican leader Robert Dole and presidential adviser Paul Laxalt asserted yesterday that President Reagan must apologize to the public for selling arms to Iran and demonstrate hands-on leadership for the first time if he hopes to save his presidency.

These suggestions represented the bluntest public criticism the President has ever received from high-ranking supporters and came as he prepared his first major address on the Iran-contra affair in more than three months.

"I hope he tells the American people this was a bad trip and we shouldn't have gone on it," Laxalt, a former Republican senator from Nevada, said on ABC's *This Week with David Brinkley*.

Laxalt, one of Reagan's closest political confidants, added that it is "absolutely critical" at this juncture of his presidency for the 76-year-old Reagan to adopt a "hands-on management style."

"He's going to have to get his head and his gut squarely into this operation and stay on top of it," he said.

Dole, a Republican from Kansas, said on NBC's *Meet the Press* that Reagan needs to "tell the American people he's sorry" about the secret arms-for-hostages deal with Iran and start displaying a "more involved, more hands-on" style.

"I don't know how you can run anything without knowing what's going on," added Dole, who is expected to seek the GOP nomination in 1988 to succeed Reagan.

The Tower commission report on the scandal harshly rebuked Reagan for a detached management style that left subordinates free to pursue his policy goals through questionable operations about which he claimed ignorance.

The report also concluded that Reagan seemed to be the only member of his administration who did not see the transaction as a direct trade of weapons for hostages.

Former Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, one of the Tower commission members, said yesterday that the panel was astonished by Reagan's loss of memory concerning important details of the affair and that he questioned whether the President "can come to grips with the responsibilities of his office."

Muskie, commenting about Reagan's appearances before the commission, said on CBS's *Face the Nation*:

"I wouldn't say that we've treated him as a mental patient — or considered him a mental patient. But certainly, we were all appalled by the absence of the kind of alertness and vigilance to his job and to these policies that one expects of a president."

Muskie said that in his meetings with the Tower commission, Reagan "was definite in what he remembered and what he didn't. But what he didn't remember astonished us, because by that time, we had been exposed to a great deal of the story. And we expected him to reinforce some rather obvious developments. ... And he did not recall them. And he did not recall meetings that we knew took place at that point."

Presidential counselor David M. Abshire said yesterday that Reagan was "deeply disturbed by the implications" of the Tower report and that the panel's findings are having "a very constructive effect" on him.

Abshire, who was present when the Tower board presented its report to Reagan on Thursday, said in an interview that the President was "shaken by some of the findings" and predicted that he would deal directly and personally with the issue when he addresses the nation on television Wednesday night.

Administration sources said that Reagan is still having difficulty accepting the board's conclusion that the Iran initiative was essentially a trade of weapons for hostages, but predicted that he would demonstrate this understanding in his speech.

Many political observers say the address is the most important of his presidency, because it will indicate

whether he has the energy and determination to reassert his leadership or whether he will fade as a political force during the last two years of his term.

Reagan's popularity ratings have plummeted since the scandal first broke in November, and a new poll by Newsweek magazine reports that 40 percent of those surveyed approved of Reagan's leadership of the country — the lowest approval rating of his presidency. Newsweek also said one-third of those surveyed said Reagan should consider stepping down.

However, Brent Scowcroft, one of the three members of the Tower commission who Reagan appointed to investigate the activities of the National Security Council, said yesterday that he had no doubt that Reagan could survive the controversy.

Indeed, the administration's hopes rose quickly yesterday over Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev's proposal for U.S.-Soviet agreement on limiting nuclear missiles in Europe was the kind of opening Reagan needed to take command and to divert attention from the Iran scandal. Laxalt called Gorbachev's proposal "the most reassuring news that I've seen on the international front for a long time."

The President previously has accepted responsibility for the affair and acknowledged that "mistakes were made" in carrying out his policies. But he has defended the policy as a worthwhile attempt to improve ties with Iran. He has not admitted that he was the one who made mistakes — an admission virtually all of his senior advisers are said now to favor as a way of getting the controversy behind him.

Laxalt also urged Reagan to withdraw the nomination of deputy CIA director Robert M. Gates to become head of the intelligence agency because of the controversy.

"I think the Gates nomination is in trouble" with the Senate, which must confirm him, Laxalt said. Although Gates may be a victim of circumstance, "he has the smell of Iran on him" and "the administration ought to take a second look," Laxalt added.

Dole acknowledged that Gates' nomination was in trouble and said he expected a White House decision this week. White House sources said no decision had been made as of yesterday.

The Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post contributed to this article.